

REMARKS OF SENATOR JOHN GLENN
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT
FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 1984
COLUMBUS, OHIO

President Jennings, Chairman Hilliker, distinguished faculty, graduates and their families, ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I want to apologize to the students for arriving a little late this morning. Actually, I would have been here in plenty of time--but they wouldn't let me park on campus without a sticker either.

President Reagan says inflation is under control. Obviously, he doesn't have to buy parking stickers here at Ohio State.

But I'm glad to be here today--and I especially want to thank President Jennings for his advice. Just before I got up to speak, he warned me that there are two things I shouldn't joke about today.

One is the record of the Buckeye football team.

And the other is the graduates from the Dental School.

Well, I can assure you that I don't intend to make jokes about the dentists. Everyone knows they're much too dignified for that.

But frankly, as far as football goes, I don't see why I can't mention the Bucks. After all, they had a lot better year than I did.

But all kidding aside, let me say that one of the best and most moving aspects of my Presidential campaign was the tremendous support I received from so many students here at OSU. Hundreds of you flew, drove or rode buses to state after state on my behalf--and I want you to know that Annie and I will never forget it.

And I want you to know something else as well. I want you to know that I'm proud you believed in me--and I want you to know that I will continue to stand and speak for the causes, for the purposes, and for the programs that can build this Nation the kind of future we know it should and can have.

So even though things didn't turn out quite as we planned, I sincerely thank everyone who supported me here at Ohio State--one of the greatest universities on the face of this earth.

In thinking about what I would say today, the first thing that came to mind was the advice I gave some of you four years ago when you were freshmen. Back then, you may recall, I quoted those immortal and poetic words of that great educational philosopher, comedian Nipsey Russell, who said:

"Go to college, stay in college
Stay there 'till you are through.
If they can make penicillin out of mold
They can make something out of you."

Well, you did--and they did -- and that's why we're here. Nevertheless, I somehow sensed that the majesty of this occasion called for something more.

So the next thing that came to mind were all those old cliches that commencement speakers just can't seem to do without. You know the ones I'm talking about -- so let me do us all a favor and get them out of the way early.

"The past is prologue."

or

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

or

"The future is in your hands."

or

"What you are to be, you are now becoming."

or

"Commencement is a beginning."

Now cliches, of course, are trite by definition. But the main reason people keep using them is because they're so obviously true.

Commencement, for example, really is a beginning--and starting today, most of you will begin making some truly important choices and decisions.

In my view, one of the most important of those decisions concerns the kind of relationship you will have with your society. Will you choose to be essentially an "isolationist"--concerned only with your own life? Or will you be someone who also chooses to become involved with the life of your country?

Naturally, I hope all of you will choose the latter course. But you do have a choice. And in that sense, you and your country are very different from one another.

Once, America could afford to be isolationist--but those days are gone forever. Today, we're an integral part of the world community--and what happens in London or Paris or Moscow has a dramatic impact on Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati.

And I'm not just talking about the issue of war and peace, either. Right now--today--1 out of every 7 manufacturing jobs in this state depends on the sale of our products abroad--and as every good Ag School graduate can tell you, 2 out of every 5 acres of American farmland also produces for export.

So no matter how you slice it, the question for America in the '80s is not whether we will play a role in the world, but what kind of role we will play.

a greater voice than the President of the United States. And when it comes to choosing the President, nobody will have a greater voice than you will this November. So if you'll pardon the cliché, the future--my friends--is very much in your hands.

Assuming you choose to accept that responsibility, how are you to meet it? How are you supposed to decide which Presidential candidate is worthy of your vote?

Well, let me suggest that you can make that decision the same way your professors decided who should graduate today: construct some tests--and then decide for yourselves which candidates have passed them.

Now depending on what you majored in, you probably have differing ideas about the areas and issues on which a President should be judged. One test might be the economy; jobs, budget deficits, interest rates, and exports. Most of us here today were not at last year's graduation when Vice President Bush extolled the virtues of this Administration's economic policies, as he saw them. With the advantage of an additional year's hindsight--and after another couple of hundred billion dollars of national debt has been passed along to your generation--it is tempting to rebut some of those policies; policies I discussed in considerable detail during the Presidential campaign, and which I believe are exceedingly hazardous to our future economic health.

But I believe there is another Presidential test that is even more important--and that is in the area of foreign policy. Because if a President passes that test, all of us are better off. But if a President fails that test in this Nuclear Age, the "F" he receives can literally stand for "fatal."

Now all good professors know that the hardest part of administering a test is devising the questions. But I think most of us could agree that at least the following three are crucial:

- First, do our dealings with the rest of the world reflect the ethical values and moral principles we claim to support as a nation?
- Second, is our foreign policy consistent and being conducted in a way that inspires other nations to follow our leadership?
- Finally--and most important of all--does our foreign policy enhance the prospects for peace? If it does not, then neither will it have the confidence or support of the American people.

I believe these are serious issues and fair questions. And I believe that on all of them, the record of the Reagan Administration speaks for itself.

Instead of standing tall for the values and principles that built this Nation, the Administration cozies up to apartheid in Africa, and it gives up on human rights in the Americas. Instead of carrying out consistent policies that have the support of our allies, they've been pursuing flip-flop policies that confuse our friends and embolden our enemies. And instead of putting foreign policy in the hands of experienced professionals who know what they are doing, this Administration has already gone through two Secretaries of State, two Arms Control Directors, and three National Security Advisors. In fact, even Secretary of State Schultz recently stated that except for himself, there are still no top-level people at the State Department with extensive experience in either arms control or East-West relations.

the water. Instead of talking to the Soviets, the President has tried to intimidate them. Instead of negotiating with them, he's called them names. And now--three and a half years later--all we've got to show for this rhetorical shoot-out is a Geneva walk-out and an Olympics pull-out.

No one is more solidly anticommunist than I am. And no one is more dedicated than I to maintaining a strong America that can defend its territory and interests. Indeed, I have always said that the first responsibility of government is to keep our people alive, independent and free.

But what we need now is not more hostility between the superpowers. What we need now is not more careless talk--either from those who blithely assume we can somehow win this game of international chicken--or from those who naively insist that the Soviets are just like us and long to be our friends. What we need now is leadership -- leadership that understands that while the Soviets are never likely to be our friends, unless we learn to live with them, sooner or later we may die with them.

Frankly, I do not see that understanding in this Administration. I do not see them turning away from the outdated belief that force--or the threat of force--is the solution to all our foreign policy problems. What I see instead is a continuation of the policies that have led to arms build-ups and diplomatic breakdowns. And I believe millions of other Americans can see that too. In fact, public opinion polls tell us that if we were to paraphrase that famous question candidate Reagan asked in 1980--"Are we nearer or farther from war than we were four years ago?"--the majority of Americans would say we are closer. And most frightening of all, they would be right.

In the Middle East, we are again poised at the brink of confrontation. Our policy in Lebanon was mistaken from the start, and a disaster at the end--and 261 brave young servicemen paid for it with their lives. And now the tangled web that is Central America threatens to ensnare us in another not-so-tender trap of violence and bloodshed.

In recent weeks, the President has downplayed the possibility of direct U.S. military involvement in that troubled region. He has said he does not foresee the need to send U.S. combat troops into the conflict. He has pointed out that no Central American country has even asked us to do so. And he has insisted that if Congress will just approve his latest aid request, things will surely improve.

But in the final analysis, no amount of military assistance can win the war or buy the peace in Central America. And that is because the most pressing problems in that region are not military, but economic, social and political. To ignore that reality is to ignore the lessons of history. And to ignore the lessons of history is to risk once again winding up on the wrong side of it.

But please do not misunderstand me. We cannot afford to walk away from Central America--nor can we afford to be indifferent to what happens there.

But to achieve those goals--and to gain the peace we seek in Central America--I believe we must move in a new direction.

First, we should use all the power and influence we have to promote a regionwide political settlement. Fortunately, the democratic nations of Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Panama are willing to take the lead--and they've already set forth a comprehensive 21-point plan for peace. We may not agree with every recommendation they have to offer--but it's time we regarded the Contadora process as the main event, and not just a side show.

Second, I believe we must do all we can to create a climate for peace. In El Salvador, that means conditioning our aid on steady improvements in human rights, land reform and social justice. But above all, it means seeing to it that the government of that country ends the death squads--and ends them now. Since 1979, some 40,000 people in El Salvador have been murdered--and it is time for the killing to stop.

Elsewhere in Central America, we must work hard to halt terrorism -- whether it is directed against the governments in power or by the governments in power. And as a first step, let us stop supporting terrorism ourselves. We should stop funding the rebels who are seeking to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. We should stop intimidating the region with gunboat diplomacy and massive, seemingly endless military exercises in Honduras. And let us never again secretly mine the harbors of any country with whom we are not at war.

Third and finally, I believe we must begin to deal with the true sources of revolution in Central America: hunger, injustice, repression and poverty. So long as these conditions persist, there will be unrest--and the Soviets will try to exploit it. But if we can improve those conditions, the Soviets will have little left to exploit.

I think the folly of our current policy in Central America was best summed up by a prominent Republican in a recent speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He said--and I quote--"The people in these countries have enormous problems. The trouble is that the communists at least talk about the problems. Too often, we just talk about the communists."

It might surprise you to learn that the man who made that speech was former President Richard Nixon. And on this issue at least, Richard Nixon is right--and Ronald Reagan is wrong.

So instead of spending all our time fighting the effects, let us begin to focus on the cause. And instead of offering the countries of Central America only more weapons and more war, let us seek to bring the people of Central America more food and more opportunity. That is how we can again become a beacon of hope in Latin America--and that is how we can lead the way toward liberty throughout the world.

And now let me close with a personal word to each and every graduate of this great university. I began these remarks by urging you to play a role in the life of your country. I asked you to become involved in choosing a President this November--and I reminded you that in that sense, the future really is in your hands.

And as I wrote those words, I couldn't help remembering something that happened in my own family around the time most of you were first starting school.

Robert Kennedy was a close personal friend of ours--and he once wrote a book called To Seek A Newer World. As he gave a copy of that book to my son, Dave, he sat down to write an inscription in it. After thinking for several minutes, he wrote something and handed it to my son. It said: "To Dave--If we don't find it, you must."

Bob Kennedy never lived to see the kind of world he sought. But if there is one thing I hope you will all remember as you leave here today, it is that each of us has a responsibility "to seek a newer world." And in 1984, finding it can no longer be a matter of "you must"--sometime--but we must--and now.

Thank you, congratulations, and God bless you.